

NCA  
VOC FOR IOP/FN  
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5607  
ROBERT CHANCELLOR/JOHANNESBURG

MARCH 12, 1978

FOCUS: PERCY QOBOZA

ANNCR:

ONE OF AFRICA'S BEST KNOWN JOURNALISTS, SOUTH AFRICAN NEWSPAPER EDITOR, PERCY QOBOZA, HAS BEEN FREED AFTER NEARLY FIVE MONTHS IN POLICE DETENTION. VOA'S BOB CHANCELLOR IN JOHANNESBURG HAS THIS PROFILE OF THE MAN AND HIS WORK.

VOICE:

PERCY QOBOZA WAS THE EDITOR OF SOUTH AFRICA'S SECOND LARGEST DAILY NEWSPAPER, THE WORLD, WHICH WAS DIRECTED AT AND READ BY BLACK PEOPLE IN THE JOHANNESBURG AREA. LIKE ITS EDITOR, THE WORLD WAS OUTSPOKEN AND TOUGH MINDED, AND LAST OCTOBER NINETEENTH IN THE WHITE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT CRACKDOWN ON DISSENT AND GROWING BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS, THE WORLD WAS BANNED. PERCY QOBOZA WAS PUT IN JAIL -- DETENTION WITHOUT TRIAL -- ALONG WITH ABOUT FIFTY OTHER SOUTH AFRICAN BLACK LEADERS.

NOW, THE EDITOR HAS BEEN FREED ALONG WITH NINE OTHERS IN DETENTION, AND ALL INDICATIONS ARE THAT HE WILL RETURN TO NEWSPAPER WORK. MISTER QOBOZA WAS RELEASED FROM MODDERBEE PRISON THIS PAST WEEKEND -- UNCONDITIONALLY AT THE INTERCESSION OF MINISTER OF JUSTICE JAMES KRUGER.

THE FORTY YEAR OLD JOURNALIST IMMEDIATELY BEGAN A TWO-WEEK VACATION WITH HIS WIFE AND THREE CHILDREN, SAYING HE WILL DISCUSS HIS FUTURE WHEN HE RETURNS FROM THAT SOJOURN. BUT HIS FORMER EMPLOYERS, THE ARGUS NEWSPAPER GROUP, WHICH OWN THE NOW-DEFUNCT WORLD, SAY THEY ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO MISTER QOBOZA RESUMING HIS JOB. WITH THE WORLD OUT OF BUSINESS, IT IS LIKELY HE WILL BECOME EDITOR OF THE POST, ANOTHER ARGUS NEWSPAPER WHICH BECAME THE BLACK DAILY FOR JOHANNESBURG WHEN

THE WORLD WAS CLOSED, AND WHICH ABSORBED MOST OF THE STAFF OF THE WORLD. THE POST HAS PROSPERED IN THE PAST FEW MONTHS, BUT IT NEVER HAS GAINED THE SORT OF STATURE AMONG THIS COUNTRY'S BLACKS AS THE WORLD HAD AT ITS PEAK -- PERHAPS BECAUSE IT LACKED MISTER QOBOZA'S STRONG LEADERSHIP.

BUT BEYOND RESUMING HIS NEWSPAPER CAREER, PERCY QOBOZA HAS A NEW QUEST, TOO. HE SAYS HIS HAPPINESS CAN ONLY BE FULFILLED WHEN OTHER BLACK LEADERS DETAINED, TOO, ARE RELEASED. "DURING MY MONTHS IN PRISON," HE SAID, "I CAME TO KNOW THESE MEN. I THINK ABOUT THEM. I WILL DO ALL I CAN TO TRY AND SEE THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE AND GET HIM TO RELEASE THEM." MISTER QOBOZA ALSO WANTS TO ASK WHY HE WAS DETAINED AND WHY HIS NEWSPAPER WAS BANNED.

PERCY QOBOZA -- TO ALL APPEARANCES -- IS NOT AN ANARCHIST OR A TROUBLE MAKER. HE IS A BRIGHT, ARTICULATE MAN WHO WENT TO HARVARD UNIVERSITY ON A NEIMAN FELLOWSHIP IN NINETEEN SEVENTY-FIVE. HE OCCASIONALLY COMES UNDER CRITICISM FROM RADICAL BLACK ACTIVISTS WHO FEEL HE IS TOO MODERATE. HE SOMETIMES DESPAIRS ABOUT THE DIRECTION OF SOUTH AFRICA. BUT AT THE SAME TIME, HE CAN BE GOOD HUMORED AND OPTIMISTIC. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER OR NOT HIS IMPRISONMENT HAS EMBITTERED HIM. BUT WITH HIS LIKELY RETURN TO SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNALISM, MR. QOBOZA'S VOICE WILL AGAIN BE HEARD...AND, PERHAPS BECAUSE OF HIS EXPERIENCE, HEDED EVEN MORE SO THAN BEFORE.

JS/PY